* The Budget for 2003-04 in particular lays emphasis on infrastructure development and enhancing of manufacturing sector efficiency. To this end it provides a major thrust to infrastructure principally to roads, railways, airports and seaports through innovative funding mechanism. To enhance efficiency, the budget has carried forward the process of excise duty rationalisation and further reduction in peak customs duty rate to 25 percent.

* To improve operating environment of the industry the Government has enacted several laws, which include the Competition Act and amendments to SEBI Act.

* In order to boost exports, the current EXIM policy seeks to consolidate and accelerate India's export growth by capitalising on the areas of its core competence. It lays special focus on potential high growth industrial sectors, namely, textiles, auto components, gems & jewellery, drugs & pharmaceuticals and electronics hardware.

* The Reserve Bank of India has continued its stance of following low interest rates in its latest credit policy announcement for 2003-04. Bank rate has been reduced to 6% from 6.25%. The Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) has also been reduced to 4.50% from 4.75%. This will provide adequate liquidity to meet credit growth and support investment demand in the economy.

Procurement of Tobacco in Andhra Pradesh

32. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO : Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Andhra Pradesh Government has requested the Central Government to ask the STC to procure tobacco at higher price to enable the farmers to get a good price in the market; and

(b) if so, the action taken to bail out the farmers in distress?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.